

# Attracting and Retaining Middle School Youth in After-School

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# Presentation will be a mix...

- Theory and Research
- Business Model Approach
- Lessons from Experience

# Resources:

Priscilla Little, et al., Manhattan Strategies (formerly with HFRP), *Participation Over Time, Keeping Youth Engaged (2010); Moving beyond the barriers (2004); other HFRP Reports.*

Steven Amick, THINK Together; League of Afterschool Providers (CA), *Middle School Programming for Entrepreneurs*

Experiences stemming from 27 middle school after-school programs in Fairfax County

# Middle school youth are becoming “not children”...

- Gaining independence; making own decisions about what to do with their time; exploring new roles; forming stronger identities; tighter peer relationships; developing closer relationships with adults; preparing themselves for careers

And they are changing rapidly over a 2 year time span:

- Two distinct developmental groups:  
6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders; 8<sup>th</sup> graders

# Individual attention...

- Develop individual relationships with youth
- Flexibility in scheduling and expectations
- Variety of opportunities for youth to excel
- Multiple program strategies – one size doesn't fit all
- Structure

# What does the national data say:

- Youth participate in After-School to:
  - have fun with friends
  - learn new skills in arts, sports, service learning, recreation activities
  - be around caring adults
  - feel safe

Adapted from HFRP Reports, July, 2004; May, 2005; Child Trends Briefs; Policy and Practice Brief, 2009.

# When asked to rank a list of program attributes and explain their preferences, young people\* ...

- Indicated a strong desire to being exposed to new ideas, new challenges, new people.
- Highlighted the need for programs to make them feel comfortable, welcomed, respected, and accepted.
- Stressed the desire to provide opinions & ideas, and be given leadership opportunities & responsibilities.

\* *Negotiating Among Opportunity and Constraint*, R. Chaskin & S. Baker, Chapin Hall Center for Children, 2006.

# Build it and they will come...

- Doesn't work for after-school for young adolescents ...
- After-school time is a very competitive marketplace ...



# Consider a Business Model for After-School...

- After-school programming is your business.
- After-school time is your market.
- Middle school students are your customers.
- Your program is your product.
- Students' free time is your revenue.

# The Basic Question to be Answered...

Why should your customers do business with you, instead of someone else?

What are some strategies for attracting and retaining youth?

# 1. Help Youth Understand the Value of Participation

Make the connection between frequent participation and the opportunity to:

- Improve grades
- Learn new skills
- Make new friends
- Contribute to the community
- Have fun
- Play sports, fitness opportunities
- Learn about careers
- Dance, cook, play video games
- Write poetry, compose music, act
- Eat

## 2. Show Families the Benefits Associated with Participation

Make a strong case to parents of the benefits of child's regular involvement:

- Homework help and tutoring – scheduled time
- Socialization
- Form new friendships
- Involvement in physical fitness, sports
- Exposure to the arts and sciences
- Association w/ positive adults (teachers and others)
- Foster positive youth development
- Learn new skills – babysitting, cooking

Be and be perceived as a safe and engaging place

# 3. Market Directly to Youth and Their Families

The regular stuff:

- Flyers, signs, PA announcements – student designed
- Recruiting during lunch, in hallways
- Back-to-school nites; Open house events
- Materials sent home
- Websites, Keep in Touch
- Logo and naming contests

Hold “after-school” fair at the beginning of the year

- Offer pizza
- Activity tables w/ staff and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, HS students

# 3. cont'd

Have students recruit friends-

In FCPS:

- Over 50% of students report their friends are in after-school always or most times
- The 2<sup>nd</sup> most frequently cited reason for attending – my friends are attending
- 25% don't attend more often because their friends are not attending

Approach:

- Ask each student to bring a friend, or two
- Recruit in peer circles
- Find who the student leaders are
- Student focus groups help in determining activities offered
- Allows youth to build their leadership skills

# 3. cont'd

## Continue to communicate w/ parents regularly

- Lack of awareness - Many parents remarked they did not know what activities were offered or when
- Need to do more than sending flyers home or the website
- Be repetitive
- Make flyers/calendars for counselors/teachers
- Reach out to parents when a student's attendance wanes
- Evening event for parents - activity tables, parents and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, outreach to families
- Remind parents of the benefits of after-school – complete HW, engage in STEM, art, drama,...

## Address misperceptions early

- After-school is not solely for students with academic difficulties or behavior/gang issues.



## 4. Recruit Students Who May Be At-Risk

- They may benefit the most from A-S
- They may have had a negative experience at school hook them w/ the fun activities
- Work closely w/ teachers/counselors to identify and encourage them to participate
- Hire staff who demonstrate ability to relate well to these youth
- Offer activities that they will see to be beneficial to them: service learning; college preparedness; career exploration; learn new skills
- Recruit them to participate in one activity of finite duration – be specific

# 5. Hire Staff Who Make Real Connections with Students

- Understand school culture
- Be visible
- Employ staff who enjoy participating in activities – rather than just supervising
- Staff should be engaging youth
- Two significant factors associated w/ long term program participation:
  1. Positive relationships with A-S staff
  2. Variety of interesting activities

## 6. Hook 'Em w/ Both Fun and Relaxing Times

- Provide dynamic, balanced program content
- Substantive and varied activities hold students' interest over the school year – keep it fresh
- Non-academic opportunities provide much-needed time for relaxation, socializing, and personal pursuits
- Activities that promote academic achievement, physical and mental health, and overall positive development (without being more of the school day)
- Opportunities for youth to grow by learning, making choices, and developing problem solving skills

Mondays 3:00-4:30 Late Bus	Tuesdays 3:00-5:45 Parent Pick-up	Wednesdays 3:00-4:30 Late Bus	Thursdays 3:00-4:30 Late Bus	Fridays 3:00-5:45 Parent Pick-up
<u>Homework Club</u> Library Always Open!	<u>Homework Club</u> 3-4, Rm. 107 Always Open!	<u>Homework Club</u> Library Always Open!	<u>Homework Club</u> Library Always Open!	<u>Homework Club</u> 3-4, Rm. 107 Always Open!
<u>Games Room</u> Cafeteria Always Open!	<u>Weight Room</u> 3-4, Weight Room Sign-up Required	<u>Games Room</u> Cafeteria Always Open!	<u>Games Room</u> Cafeteria Always Open!	<u>Weight Room</u> 3-4, Weight Room Sign-up Required
<u>Boot Camp</u> Gym Sign-up Required	<u>Girls on the Move</u> 3-4:30, Cafeteria Sign-up Required	<u>Intramural Flag Football</u> Gym Attend 1 <sup>st</sup> Week	<u>Intramural Flag Football</u> Gym Attend 1 <sup>st</sup> Week	<u>Girls on the Move</u> 3-4:30, Cafeteria Sign-up Required
<u>ECO Club</u> Rm. 107 Always Open!	<u>Cooking</u> 3-4:30, Rm. 141 <b>*Commitment Form</b>	<u>Art in the Courtyard</u> Rm. 133 Sign-up Required	<u>Fashion Crafts</u> TBD Sign-up Required	<u>Soccer Club</u> 3-4:30, Cafeteria Always Open!
<u>German Club</u> Rm. 134 Sign-up Required	<u>Soccer Academy</u> 3-5:30, Cafeteria Tryout Required	<u>Creative Writing</u> Rm. 129 Sign-up Required	<u>4H/FACS Club</u> Rm. 142 <b>*Commitment Form</b>	<u>Tech for the Creative Teen</u> 3-4:30, Rm. 135 <b>*Commitment Form</b>
<u>Girls Volleyball</u> Gym Sign-up Required	<b>**Games Room</b> 4-5:45, Cafeteria Always Open!	<u>Fashion Club</u> Rm. 115 Sign-up Required	<u>Dance Team</u> Aux. Gym Sign-up Required	<u>Zumba</u> 3-4:30, Aux. Gym Always Open!
<u>Short Stories &amp; Snacks</u> Rm. 204 Sign-up Required		<u>Girls Lacrosse Skills</u> Rm. 154 Sign-up Required	<u>ECO Club</u> Rm. 107 Always Open!	<u>Soccer Academy</u> 3-5:30, Cafeteria Tryout Required
<u>TSA LEGO Robotics Club</u> Rm. 151 Attend 1 <sup>st</sup> Meeting		<u>Lanier Friends</u> Rm. 144 Sign-up Required	<u>Games with Friends</u> Rm. 222 Sign-up Required	<b>**Games Room</b> 4-5:45, Cafeteria Always Open!
<u>Vanguard Team</u> Rm. 153 Sign-up Required		<u>Math Counts</u> Rm. TBD Sign-up Required	<u>Guitar Club</u> Rm. 108 Sign-up Required	
<u>Reptile Club</u> Meets Bi-weekly Sign-up Required		<u>Model UN</u> Rm. 128 Sign-up Required	<u>Lanier Friends</u> Rm. 144 Sign-up Required	
<u>College &amp; Career Exploration (CCE)</u> Sign-up Required		<u>Drama Club/Fall Play</u> Black Box Sign-up Required	<u>Latin Club</u> Rm. 134 Sign-up Required	
<b>Parent Pick-up</b> <b>4:30-5:45</b>		<b>4:30-5:45</b> <b>Parent Pick-up</b>	<u>Literary Magazine</u> Rm. 206 Sign-up Required	
<b>**Basketball Academy</b> Gym Tryout Required		<b>**Basketball Academy</b> Gym Tryout Required	<u>Yearbook</u> Rm. 133 Attend 1 <sup>st</sup> Meeting	
<b>**Game Time</b> XBOX PS3 Wii		<b>**Game Time</b> XBOX PS3 Wii	<u>Math Team</u> Rm. 124 Monthly Competitions - TBA	
			<b>4:30-5:45</b> <b>Parent Pick-up</b>	
			<b>**Weight Room</b> Weight Room Sign-up Required	
			<b>**Game Time</b> XBOX PS3 Wii	

# 7. Link Academics to Engaging Projects

Ways to keep youth engaged:

- Sufficient choice of high-interest activities
- Group oriented activities that involve collaboration and communication
- Fun, enriching, hands-on activities that are challenging
- High expectations for participation
- Integrated approach to problem solving
- Interdisciplinary projects
- Project-based learning – culminating event/activity
- Stimulate academic curiosity
- Promote critical thinking and problem solving
- Inspire success
- High engagement activities provide avenue for short-term success

# A Final Thought...

*“This culture does not emerge magically from some accumulated sets of activities, but demands enormous effort to build and maintain.”\**

\* Massachusetts 2020 Research Report, Fall 2005

**“You’ve been told during your high school years and your college years that you are now about to enter the real world, and you’ve been wondering what it’s like. Let me tell you that the real world is not college. The real world is not high school. The real world, it turns out, is much more like *middle school*. You are going to encounter, for the rest of your life, the same petty jealousies, the same irrational juvenile behavior, the same uncertainty that you encountered during your adolescent years. That is your burden. We share it with you. We wish you well.”**

**--- Tom Brokaw, Commencement Address  
Skidmore College, May, 2007**